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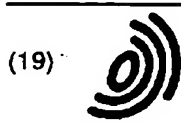
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(54) **Use of astaxanthin for the treatment of stress**

(57) An anti-stress composition having for its active ingredient astaxanthin and/or its ester. This composition

can be in the form of a pharmaceutical, functional food, food or beverage and so forth.

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Description

The present invention relates to an anti-stress composition comprising astaxanthin and/or its ester, and a food or beverage to which it is added. More specifically, the present invention relates to a composition for preventing or alleviating decreased immunological function, decreased liver function and fatigue caused by stress as well as those medical conditions due to decreased immunological function caused by stress such as cancer metastasis, comprising astaxanthin and/or its ester, and to a food or beverage prepared by adding said composition, astaxanthin or ester to a food or beverage material.

Stress is quite prevalent in modern society, and those diseases caused by stress, namely somatic disorders as well as stress disorders such as neurosis and depression, are increasing. Stress disorders and other related disorders are believed to comprise a condition in which stress destroys the ability to maintain homeostasis by the body. Alleviation and treatment of these disorders consists of nosotropic therapy for each symptom and disease.

In addition, drugs such as anti-anxiety agents and sleeping pills for temporarily alleviating somatic reactions when exposed to stress are considered to be an effective means of dealing with stress. However, there are no known drugs that are able to fundamentally inhibit or reduce stress. Moreover, various relaxation techniques for the mind and body have been proposed as ways of effectively controlling stress so prevent destruction of the body's homeostasis. However, long-term efforts will most likely be required due to personal differences and other factors.

In addition, various drugs and foods have been developed for the purpose of preventing and reducing stress or fatigue. Typical examples of these include sports drinks and tonics. Sports drinks have a rapid moisture absorption rate and are intended to rapidly supplement vitamins, amino acids and minerals lost due to perspiration. They do not prevent or reduce stress and fatigue directly. Tonics, on the other hand, contain extracts from several medical plants in addition to vitamins and amino acids. These are expected to have physiological effects such as central nervous system stimulation, increased blood flow, cardiac effects and activation of endocrine system. However, many of the physiological effects of these natural drugs are based on old legends, and none are known, on a scientific basis, to prevent or reduce stress.

More recently, there have been numerous reports which stated that stress, affliction and numerous mental disorders are all pronounced emotional disorders, indicating research results that show that these disorders are closely linked with decreased immunological function of the body. Although the concept of mental anguish being a cause of illness is itself quite old, only recently has attention been focused on this concept in scientific fields as well. Considerable immunological research has been conducted on the relationship between stress and cancer in particular. However, there are no known specific compounds that inhibit the onset and metastasis of cancer caused by stress.

Astaxanthin is one of secondary carotenoids, and is present in animals such as crustaceans including krill, shrimp and crabs, the muscle and eggs of salmon and trout, and the body surfaces of sea bream, carp and goldfish.

At present, although astaxanthin is used as a color restorer for cultured fish such as sea bream, salmon, trout and yellowtail, recent research has clearly shown that astaxanthin can become provitamin A as well as demonstrate remarkable antioxidative effects. It is thus expected to be used in natural coloring agents, antioxidants, nutritional supplements, cosmetics and pharmaceuticals [Yamashita, E: Food and Development, Vol. 27, No. 3 (Consecutive Volume No. 409), p. 38-40 (1992)]. In addition, Japanese Unexamined Patent Publication No. 63-83017 discloses a sunburn-preventive cosmetic containing astaxanthin, while Japanese unexamined Patent Publication No. 2-49091 discloses an antioxidant having astaxanthin for its active ingredient along with a pharmaceutical and an antiphlogistic for defending against oxidative tissue disorders of the body.

In addition, astaxanthin is also known to have cancer cell growth inhibitory activity [Carotenoids of Marine Life (Miki, W. ed.), p.105-113, Koseisha, Koseikaku (April 1993)] and antibody production activity [H. Jyonouchi et al., Nutrition and Cancer, Vol. 19, No. 3, p. 269-280 (1993)].

However, astaxanthin is not known to have anti-stress effects or be effective in the prevention or alleviation of decreased immunological function, decreased liver function and fatigue.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

Thus, the present invention is intended to provide a composition, and a food or beverage composed by adding said composition, that has a high degree of safety, and is used for the purpose of preventing or alleviating various symptoms accompanying stress, and particularly decreased immunocompetency, decreased liver function and fatigue, caused by stress as well as medical conditions and so forth due to decreased immunological function caused by stress such as cancer metastasis and cancer promotion.

As a result of earnest research conducted to solve the above-mentioned problems, the inventors of the present invention found that astaxanthin and/or its ester has effects that prevent or alleviate various symptoms accompanying stress, and particularly decreased immunological function, decreased liver function and fatigue caused by stress as well as medical conditions and so forth due to decreased immunological function caused by stress such as cancer

metastasis, thus leading to completion of the present invention.

Thus, the present invention is intended to provide an anti-stress composition comprising astaxanthin and/or its ester.

In addition, the present invention relates to a pharmaceutical or functional food for preventing or alleviating decreased immunological function, decreased liver function and fatigue caused by stress as well as medical conditions due to decreased immunological function caused by stress such as cancer metastasis and infection, comprising astaxanthin and/or its ester.

Moreover, the present invention is intended to provide a food or beverage in which an anti-stress composition or a composition for preventing or alleviating various symptoms such as decreased immunological function caused by stress is added to a food or beverage that essentially does not contain astaxanthin and/or its ester.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Fig. 1 is a graph showing the weight increasing effect of astaxanthin on decreased thymus weight caused by restraint stress.

Fig. 2 is a graph showing the improving effect of astaxanthin on decreased lymphocyte number caused by stress.

Fig. 3 is a graph showing the improving effect of astaxanthin on decreased NK cell activity caused by stress.

Fig. 4 is a graph showing the suppressive effect of astaxanthin on the formation of lipid peroxide in the liver caused by stress.

Fig. 5 is a graph showing the weight increasing effect of astaxanthin on decreased thymus weight caused by restraint stress.

Fig. 6 is a graph showing the improving effect of astaxanthin on decreased NK cell activity of liver origin caused by stress.

Fig. 7 is a graph showing the inhibitory effect of astaxanthin on increased node metastasis based on a decrease in immunoactivity caused by stress.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Stress refers to a state of distortion within the body, and includes both harmful factors applied from outside the body (stress factors) and a defense reaction that occurs in response to these stress factors. Although stress theory was first advocated by H. Selye, stress factors include physical (cold, radiation, noise, etc.), chemical (drugs, vitamin deficiency, hypoxia, etc.) and biological (bacterial infections, etc.) factors as well as mental factors (scholastic pressure, surgery, athletic competitions, etc.), and include so-called emotional stress.

When the body is subjected to stress factors, a biological response is known to occur mediated by the autonomic nervous system and the endocrine system. In the endocrine system in particular, adrenocorticotrophic hormone (ATCH) is secreted from the pituitary gland, causing the secretion of adrenocortical hormones that affect the entire body and result in a series of reactions (general adaptation syndrome).

The first stage is known as the warning reaction stage. This consists of passive disorders or signs of shock along with aggressive defense symptoms in response to this during exposure to stress. The second stage is the resistance stage. The weight of the adrenal cortex increases, and resistance to stress factors reaches its most potent and stable state. However, resistance to other stress factors conversely decreases. The third stage is the exhaustion stage. As stress factors persist for a long time at high levels, the capabilities of the body finally grow tired resulting in a loss of adaptive abilities (Nanzando Publishing, Medical Dictionary, pub. Feb. 1, 1990, 10th edition, p. 41).

Thus, although the stress response plays the useful role of a defense reaction for the body, due to excessive secretion of cortisol and adrenalin during this response, there are harmful effects on numerous body tissues, particularly in the case the body is subjected to loading by excessively high levels of stress. As a result, the body is longer able to maintain homeostasis and various diseases caused by stress are thought to occur as a result of this process. Namely, fatigue occurs due to consumption of large amounts of proteins and lipids in muscle and other tissues due to excessive secretion of cortisol. In addition, the mucous membranes of the stomach and duodenum are destroyed resulting in the occurrence of gastric and duodenal ulcers. In addition, excessive secretion of adrenalin tends to result in hypertension and diseases of the circulatory system.

Moreover, there is also known to be a correlation between stress, immunity and cancer (Imura, Y.: Neuroendocrin-immunology, Asakura Shobo Pub., pp. 299-305, 1993). Namely, although stress affects nearly all neuroendocrine functions, both sympathetic nerves and the adrenal axis, and the hypothalamus and the pituitary axis are affected by stress, bringing about reduced function of the immune system by means of a complicated process. The effect of stress is the result of modification by the nervous system, endocrine system and immune system, and is bidirectional.

Thus, stress is considered to reduce the function of NK cells and cell traumatizing T cells, which play an important role in the immune defense mechanism against cancer, and as a result, is intimately involved in the occurrence and

progress of cancer. It has also been clearly shown that bioreaction modifying substances modify the immune system and cause changes in the interaction between the neural, endocrine and immune systems, thereby changing the responsiveness to stress loading. This also suggests the possibility of defending against cancer metastasis. Moreover, infections also tend to occur easily since stress inhibits immunological function.

5 Astaxanthin and/or its ester, which is the active ingredient of the present invention, has been found in shrimp eggs [Kuhn, et al.: Angew. Chem. 51, 465 (1938) or Ber., 71, 1879 (1938)], in animal organs [Kuhn, et al., Ber., 72, 1688 (1939)], in plants [Tischer, et al.: Z. Physiol. Chem., 267, 281 (1941)], in the petals of Amur adonis and buttercups [Seybold, et al., Nature, 184, 1714 (1959)] and the red wings of birds [Z. Physiol. Chem., 288, 20 (1951)], and its structure has been determined [Grangaud, Comt. Rend., 242, 1767 (1956), or Andrews, et al., Acta. Chem. Scand., 10 B28, 730 (1974)]. Methods for its synthesis have also been established [Cooper, et al., J. Chem. Soc. Perkin Trans. I, 1975, 2195, Kienzie, et al., Helv. Chim. Acta, 61, 2609 (1978), Widmer, et al., Helv. Chim. Acta., 64, 2405 (1981), Mayer, et al., Helv. Chim. Acta., 64, 2419 (1981)], and chemically synthesized products are easily available.

15 Chemically synthesized astaxanthin, an extract of *Phaffia*, *Tigriops*, (red water flea), the shell of a crustacean such as krill, green algae or microalgae containing astaxanthin and/or its ester (which may be in the form of a solvent-extracted extract or that which has been appropriately purified as necessary), or a powder prepared by grinding a crustacean or *Haematococcus* species green algae containing astaxanthin and/or its ester, can be used for said active ingredient of the present invention.

For example, a method for extracting astaxanthin and/or its ester from the shell of a crustacean using an alkylester carboxylate is described in Japanese Unexamined Patent Publication No. 58-88353, a method for producing astaxanthin and/or its ester by culturing green algae able to biosynthesize astaxanthin, examples of which include 20 *Chlamydomonas*, *Haematococcus*, *Chlorocytium*, *Chlorella*, *Chlorococcum*, *Characium*, *Trebouxia*, *Dictyosphaerium*, *Scenedesmus*, and *Hydrodictyon*, in a medium containing Na salt, K salt and Rb salt is described in Japanese Unexamined Patent Publication No. 1-187082, and a method for producing astaxanthin and/or its ester by culturing astaxanthin-producing yeast cells such as *Phaffia* species in Difco YM medium under specified conditions following mutation 25 treatment is described in PCT Japanese National Publication No. 2-504101.

A method for increasing the formation of astaxanthin by *Haematococcus pluvialis* by adjusting the concentration ratio C:N in the culture medium during at the end of the growth phase of the microalgae species is described in PCT Japanese National Publication No. 2-501189, a mutant strain of yeast having the ability to produce astaxanthin in high yield is described in Japanese Unexamined Patent Publication No. 3-206880, and a method for manufacturing astaxanthin at a high level by a mutant strain of *Phaffia rhodzyma* is described in Japanese Unexamined Patent Publication 30 No. 4-228064.

In addition, a method for obtaining a large amount of astaxanthin by inducing cyst formation in algae by a specified method after aerobically culturing said *Haematococcus pluvialis* is disclosed in Japanese Unexamined Patent Publication No. 5-68585, and a method for extracting astaxanthin from Adonis species plants is disclosed in Japanese 35 Published Patent Publication No. 5-509227. In the present invention, an extract containing astaxanthin and/or its ester obtained by any of these methods can be used (including that in the form of a solvent-extract or that which has been appropriately purified as necessary). In addition, that which has been obtained by methods other than those described above can also be used provided it can effectively provide the properties of the active ingredient of the present invention.

Moreover, although an astaxanthin-containing powder obtained by low-temperature drying followed by grinding of 40 a raw crustacean is disclosed in Japanese Unexamined Patent Publication No. 1-186860, while a ground algae composition obtained by *Haematococcus* species green algae is disclosed in Japanese Unexamined Patent Publication No. 3-83577, any powder containing astaxanthin and/or its ester can also be used in the present invention. In addition, any method other than that indicated above can be suitably used provided it is able to effectively provide the properties of the active ingredient of the present invention.

45 In addition, although a method for synthesizing astaxanthin by reacting a specific tertiary alcohol and trifluoroacetic acid at low temperatures and without using excessive reagents by going through a novel intermediate is disclosed in Japanese Unexamined Patent Publication No. 4-225933, astaxanthin and/or its ester chemically synthesized by any method, including the above method, can also be used in the present invention.

Moreover, a method for manufacturing yellow to reddish-orange pigment astaxanthin is described in Japanese 50 Unexamined Patent Publication No. 60-4558 wherein the viable form or dried form of krill is immersed in an organic solvent such as acetone, n-hexane or ethyl acetate, the pH of the resulting solvent extract, in which the pigment is eluted, is neutralized, and lipase or base is added to decompose fatty acids and other impurities and create a liquid system followed by super-critical gas extraction, molecular distillation or washing using dilute base.

In addition, a method for manufacturing orange pigment astaxanthin is disclosed in Japanese Unexamined Patent 55 Publication No. 61-281159 wherein, after selectively hydrogenating unsaturated lipids other than the pigment with a catalyst in a crude pigment solution in which dried krill are extracted with an organic solvent such as acetone or n-hexane, lipase is added to hydrolyze the lipid, and the dissociated fatty acid is removed by addition of urea and/or molecular distillation followed, if necessary, by further concentration and purification by column chromatography. More-

over, it is described in Yamashita, E.: Food and Development, Vol. 27, No. 3 (Consecutive Volume No. 409), p. 38-40 (1992) that astaxanthin diester, monoester and free astaxanthin can be separated by performing high-performance liquid chromatography (HPLC) on a organic solvent extract or super-critical extract of krill.

Japanese Unexamined Patent Publication No. 5-155736 describes the elution and recovery of pigment by performing HPLC to remove triglycerides, polar lipids and so forth to dramatically increase pigment concentration, the removal of substances that are the source of the characteristic odor of marine products, the use of, for example, silica gel, silicic acid or activated alumina for the adsorbent that serves as the stationary phase packed into the column, the use of, for example, n-hexane, cyclohexane or petroleum ether for the low polar solvent that serves as the mobile phase, the use of, for example, n-hexane, ethyl acetate or methanol for the polar solvent, and elution of low polar lipids such as triglycerides with n-hexane followed by increasing the content of acetone in the n-hexane (the acetone content being within a range of roughly 0.1-20% acetone/n-hexane) for purification of the pigment.

In the present invention, an extract containing astaxanthin and/or its ester that has been purified with any of the above methods can also be used. In addition, methods other than those above can also be suitably used provided they are able to effectively provide the properties of the active ingredient of the present invention.

Also in the present invention, the previously described crude extracts or powders containing astaxanthin and/or its ester, that which has been suitably purified as necessary, or that which has been chemically synthesized can be used alone or in a suitable combination.

In the present invention, esters of astaxanthin include monoesters or diesters of saturated fatty acids such as palmitic acid and stearic acid, or unsaturated fatty acids such as oleic acid, linoleic acid, α -linolenic acid, γ -linolenic acid, bis-homo- γ -linolenic acid, arachidonic acid, eicosapentaenoic acid and docosahexaenoic acid, and these esters can be used alone or in a suitable combination. Since the structure of astaxanthin is such that an excess oxo group and a hydroxy group are present in the β -carotene skeleton on both of its ends, the stability of the free molecule is low, in comparison with β -carotene. In contrast, that in which the hydroxy groups on both ends are esterified with unsaturated fatty acid and so forth (e.g., krill extract) is more stable.

Although astaxanthin and/or its crude extract can be used directly after being dissolved in ethanol and diluted with water, it can also be prepared into a latex preparation as necessary. In the preparing of a latex preparation, a preparation can be easily prepared by adding gallic acid, L-ascorbic acid (or its ester or salt), gum (e.g., locust bean gum, gual gum or gelatin), vitamin P (e.g., flavoids such as hesperidin, lutein, quercetin, catechin, thianidine and eliodictin or mixtures thereof) to the aqueous phase, or by adding astaxanthin, astaxanthin crude extract or a mixture thereof to the oily phase, and then adding glycerine fatty acid ester or oil, examples of which include vegetable seed oil, soy bean oil, corn oil and other routinely used liquid oils. When emulsifying, a high-speed agitator or homogenizer should be used to mix and emulsify.

The astaxanthin of the present invention is inherently a naturally-occurring substance. Since it has been eaten, it can be easily considered to have low toxicity and a high degree of safety. It also has considerable significance as an anti-stress composition. In actuality, 2 g/kg of ASTAX 1700 (Itano Refrigerated Food Co., Ltd., oil containing 1.7% by weight of astaxanthin), an astaxanthin-containing extract obtained from krill shell and purified by HPLC, was given in a single oral administration to 4 week old, male ICR mice to assess its acute toxicity. As a result, there were no abnormalities observed with respect to general condition, appearance, body weight changes and autopsy findings.

The astaxanthin and/or its ester of the present invention can be used in the form of a pharmaceutical, cosmetic, functional food, nutritional supplement and beverage or food.

The composition of the present invention is able to prevent or improve various health disorders caused by stress. Thus, the composition of the present invention can also be used for mental or physical relaxation or for mental stabilization.

In addition, the composition of the present invention is able to prevent or alleviate decreases in immunological function caused by stress, such as physical stress caused by restraint, noise, surgical procedures or burns, disturbances in biological rhythm or social stress, and mental stress such as conditioning and passive avoidance. Thus, the composition of the present invention can be used to prevent or alleviate medical conditions caused by decreased immunological function due to stress, examples of which include infection, cancer metastasis and cancer promotion. Furthermore, improvement of conditions in the present invention includes the treatment of disease.

In addition, the composition of the present invention is able to prevent or alleviate gastric and duodenal ulcers brought about by destruction of mucous membrane in the stomach and duodenum caused by stress, decreased organ function such as that of the liver caused by stress, as well as hypertension and diseases of the circulatory system. Moreover, since the composition of the present invention is also able to inhibit physical stress, mental stress and various symptoms of fatigue caused by both, it can be used before, during and after physical labor, mental work or sports. Furthermore, alleviation of condition in the present invention includes the treatment of disease.

In the case of using the active ingredient of the present invention as a pharmaceutical, it may be administered in any formulation provided oral administration or parenteral administration can be suitably performed, examples of which include injection solutions, parenteral fluid, powders, granules, tablets, capsules, pills, enteric-coated pills, lozenges,

Internal medications, suspensions, emulsions, syrups, external medications, fomentations, nasal drops, ear drops, eye drops, inhalants, ointments, lotions, suppositories and enteral nutrients. They may be used either alone or in combination according to the symptoms. Each of these formulations can be prepared using known adjuvants routinely used in the field of drug preparation technology with the main drug according to the purpose of use in accordance with routine methods, examples of which include vehicles, binders, preservatives, oxidation stabilizers, decomposing agents, lubricants and correctives.

In addition, although the dose varies according to the purpose of administration and status of the patient (sex, age, body weight and so forth), the normal adult dose as astaxanthin in the case of oral administration is 0.1 mg to 10 g per day and preferably 0.1 mg to 1 g per day, while the range for obtaining preventive effects is 0.1 mg to 100 mg per day. In the case of parenteral administration, the normal adult dose is 0.01 mg to 1 g per day and preferably 0.01 mg to 100 mg per day, while the range for obtaining preventive effects is 0.01 mg to 10 mg per day.

In a food or beverage of the present invention prepared by adding the composition of the present invention having for its active ingredient astaxanthin and/or its ester to a food or beverage material essentially not containing astaxanthin and/or its ester, "a food or beverage essentially not containing astaxanthin and/or its ester" is, that in which the total content of astaxanthin and/or its ester daily consumed is less than 0.1 mg since the amount of astaxanthin and/or its ester contained in the finished product is extremely small.

The food or beverage of the present invention can be processed and manufactured by blending the prescribed amount of astaxanthin and/or its ester, or an extract having this, with the food or beverage raw material in accordance with routine methods. Although the blending concentration varies according to the form of the food, generally a concentration of 0.001-10% is preferable, but there are no particular limitations on this concentration. However, it should be prepared so that it contains enough of the active ingredient of the present invention per amount of daily consumption required to demonstrate its anti-stress effect, or demonstrate its effect of preventing or alleviating decreased immunological function, decreased liver function and fatigue caused by stress, or preventing and improving medical conditions due to decreased immunocompetency caused by stress such as cancer metastasis and cancer promotion.

In the food or beverage of the present invention, its form may be a solid or liquid. Examples of such foods include margarine, butter, butter sauce, cheese (natural and processed), cream, shortening, lard, ice cream, yogurt, coffee creamer, dairy products, sauces, soups, meat products, fish products, popcorn, french fries, potato chips, rice seasoning, rolled omelets, Japanese confections (including rice crackers), Western style confections (including pudding, jello, chewy candy, hard candy, drops, caramel, chocolate, chewing gum and pastries), baked confections (including custard, cake, doughnuts, biscuits, cookies and crackers), macaroni, pasta, salad oil, instant soups, dressings, eggs, mayonnaise, fermented bean curd, carbonated beverages, non-carbonated beverages (including fruit drinks and nectar drinks), soft drinks, sports drinks, tea, coffee, cocoa and other non-alcoholic beverages, liqueur, medicinal wine and other alcoholic beverages.

In the case of using the active ingredient of the present invention as a functional food or nutritional supplement, it may be in the form of any of the above-mentioned pharmaceutical preparations including capsules, granules and enteral nutrients. In addition, although examples of processed forms include natural fluid foods, semi-digested nutritional foods, component nutritional foods and drinks that are blended with proteins (although proteins such as milk protein, soy bean protein and egg albumin having a high nutritional value and balanced amino acids are most widely used for the protein source, their degradation products, egg white oligopeptides, soy bean hydrolysis products as well as mixtures of individual amino acids are also used), sugars, fat, trace elements, vitamins, emulsifiers and fragrances, there are no particular limitations on the form provided the form is that of ordinary food products.

In the case of providing in the form of a sports drink or nutritional drink, easily digestible carbohydrates, amino acids, vitamins, minerals and other nutritional additives as well as sweeteners, spices, fragrances and pigments can also be blended in order to provide nutritional balance as well as further improve taste during ingestion.

In addition, the active ingredient of the present application can also be added to any foods when preparing hospital meals under the supervision of a nutritionist based on the instructions of a physician, and meals prepared at the hospital can be given to patients.

Since astaxanthin and/or its ester is insoluble in water, it can be provided in capsules and so forth by suspending in oil either directly or using an emulsifier, astaxanthin and/or its ester can be dissolved in oil, emulsified in an aqueous solution containing surface active agent or polymer and so forth followed by dissolving the resulting emulsion in water, or it can be spray dried and provided in the form of a liquid or powder. Since the solubility of astaxanthin in oil is extremely low, although considerable time is required to dissolve crystals of astaxanthin in oil, the dissolution rate can be increased by using fine crystals. The solubility of astaxanthin also becomes extremely large when heated to 100°C or above.

On the other hand, esters of astaxanthin are highly soluble in oils, and can be easily dissolved in oils. Examples of such oils include vegetable oils such as soy bean oil, corn oil, rape seed oil, palm oil, olive oil, safflower oil, lemon oil, orange oil, peanut oil and sunflower oil, hardened oils produced by hydrogenating these oils, natural waxes such as lanolin, whale wax and bees wax, animal fats such as beef tallow, pork tallow and butter as well as wheat germ oil

and concentrated vitamin E oil. In addition, glycerine fatty acid ester, sucrose fatty acid ester, sorbitan fatty acid ester, soy bean phospholipid, propylene glycol fatty acid ester and stearate diglyceride are used as emulsifiers.

In addition, by enclosing astaxanthin and/or its ester using cyclic dextrin (α -cyclodextrin, β -cyclodextrin and γ -cyclodextrin), a powdered inclusion can be obtained that can be dissolved in water.

Furthermore, since astaxanthin and/or its ester are easily oxidized and decompose relatively easily in air, it is desirable to add an antioxidant such as vitamin E, vitamin C, glutathione, phytinic acid, catechin, flavoids or β -carotene to the active ingredient of the present invention to inhibit its decomposition.

It is desirable to ingest the food or beverage, functional food or nutritional supplement of the present invention in an amount of 0.1 mg to 10 g, and preferably 0.1 mg to 1 g, as astaxanthin for the purpose of preventing and improving symptoms of stress and maintaining health, or 0.1 mg to 100 mg for preventive effects.

EXAMPLES

Although the following Examples provide a detailed explanation of the present invention, the present invention is not limited to these Examples.

Example 1. Effect of Restraint Stress on Decreased Thymus Weight

Six week old, male C57BL/6 mice were purchased from Japan Clea Co., Ltd., and after preliminarily keeping for 1 week in an SPF (specific pathogen free) environment, were used in the experiment at age 7 weeks.

The mice were divided into a restrained group (16 mice) and a non-restrained group (5 mice). The unrestrained group was used as a control group. The restrained group was further divided into 4 groups of 4 mice each, and designated as the restrained control group, vitamin E group, β -carotene group and astaxanthin group. The restrained groups were restrained for 20 hours in metal restraint cages under conditions of minimal body movement and access to drinking water to induce restraint stress.

ASTAX 5000 manufactured by Itano Refrigerated Food Co., Ltd. (containing 3.57% astaxanthin diester and 1.53% astaxanthin monoester), extracted and purified from krill, was used for astaxanthin. ASTAX 5000 was dissolved in medium chain fatty acid triglyceride (MCT) to a concentration of 100 mg/10 ml as astaxanthin content and used as the test substance solution. Vitamin E and β -carotene were dissolved in MCT, and MCT only was administered to the control group. The test substances were given orally three times on the day before restraint, immediately after restraint, and on the day after restraint at a dose of 100 mg/kg, for each test substance.

The mice were sacrificed by dislocation of the cervical vertebra 48 hours after the start of restraint. The thymus gland was excised and weighed. Those results are shown in Fig. 1. Thymus weight decreased significantly due to restraint stress loading. The decrease in thymus weight is suggesting decreased immunological function. In contrast, this weight decrease was significantly inhibited by administration of astaxanthin, thus confirming its stress inhibitory effect.

Example 2. Effect of Restraint Stress on Reduced Spleen Lymphocyte Count and Decreased NK Cell Activity

The spleens were excised from those mice sacrificed after 48 hours after the start of restraint of Example 1. The spleens were then finely sliced with a loose-fitting glass homogenizer to prepare a free cell suspension. The cells were then subjected to hypotonic treatment to remove erythrocytes. After washing, the cells were suspended in RPMI 1640 medium containing 10% fetal calf serum (FCS), and the number of lymphocytes per spleen was counted. Those results are shown in Fig. 2. Although spleen lymphocyte count significantly decreased due to stress loading, administration of astaxanthin was confirmed to significantly inhibit this decrease in lymphocyte count.

Next, the NK cell activity of the above-mentioned spleen lymphocytes was calculated according to the method described below.

Namely, 2×10^6 , 1×10^6 and 5×10^5 cells/well of spleen lymphocytes were allocated to each well of a 96-well roundbottom microplate followed by the addition of 1×10^4 cells/well of YAC-1 target cells labeled with ^{51}Cr sodium chromate. After incubating for 6 hours at 37°C , the radioactivity released in 0.1 ml of supernatant was measured to evaluate cell impairment. NK cell activity was determined as the number of cells impairing the target cells by 30% (LU_{30}) using the following equation.

$$\% \text{ Cytolysis} = \frac{(\text{Experimental cpm} - \text{Spontaneous cpm})}{(\text{Maximum cpm} - \text{Spontaneous cpm})} \times 100$$

Those results are shown in Fig. 3. Although NK cell activity per spleen lymphocyte decreased due to stress, adminis-

tration of astaxanthin inhibited the decrease in cell impairment activity of the NK cells, thus confirming that it exhibits an inhibitory effect on decreased immunological function caused by stress.

Example 3. Effect of Restraint Stress on Increased Liver Lipid Peroxides

The livers were excised from those mice sacrificed after 48 hours from the start of restraint of Example 1. The lipid peroxides contained in the liver tissue were determined in the form of the products of reaction with 2-thiobarbituric acid (TBA) in accordance with the method of Uchiyama and Mihara (Uchiyama, et al.: Anal. Biochem. 86, 271).

Namely, 9 volumes of 1.15% cold KCl solution were added to each of the livers excised from each group of mice followed by tephrohomogenization. 0.5 ml of a 5-fold dilution of the homogenate was transferred to a capped Pyrex test tube followed by the addition of 0.3 ml of 1% phosphoric acid and 1.0 ml of 0.67% TBA solution and boiling for 45 minutes after sealing.

After rapid cooling, 4.0 ml of n-butanol were added followed by shaking and centrifugal separation for 10 minutes at 3000 rpm. The absorbance difference (A535-520) in the resulting butanol layer was then measured. The amount of TBA reaction product was calculated using 1,1,3,3-tetraethoxypropane for the standard compound and was expressed as μ moles/g liver tissue wet weight. Those results are shown in Fig. 4. As shown in Fig. 4, although liver lipid peroxide increased significantly due to restraint stress, administration of astaxanthin significantly inhibited this increase, thus confirming that it exhibits an inhibitory effect on decreased liver function caused by stress.

Example 4. Study of the Minimum Effective Dose of the Anti-Stress Effect of Astaxanthin

Astaxanthin (Roche) was dissolved in MCT to astaxanthin concentrations of 0.04 mg/10 ml, 0.2 mg/10 ml, 1.0 mg/10 ml and 5.0 mg/10 ml to prepare the test substance solutions.

Thymus weight and spleen-origin NK cell activity were measured using the same procedures as described in Examples 1 and 2. Those results are shown in Figs. 5 and 6. Animals of the astaxanthin group exhibited dose-dependent inhibitory effects on significant decreases in thymus weight caused by stress loading, and that effect was significant at doses of 1.0 mg/kg and above. With respect to NK cell activity, an inhibitory trend was observed at doses of 0.04 mg/kg and above on decreased activity caused by stress. These findings suggest that the minimum effective dose of astaxanthin is roughly 1.0 mg/kg.

Example 5. Effect of Restraint Stress on Promotion of Cancer Metastasis

7 week old, male DBA/2 mice were purchased from Japan Clea Co., Ltd., and after housing on a preliminary basis for 1 week in a specific pathogen free (SPF) atmosphere, the animals were used in the experiment at age 8 weeks.

The experimental mice were divided into three groups consisting of a restraint stress non-loaded control group (8 mice), a restraint stress loaded control group (8 mice) and a restraint stress loaded astaxanthin group (9 mice). Astaxanthin was administered orally by gavage three times on the day before restraint, immediately after the start of restraint and the day after the start of restraint at a dose of 1 mg/kg (MCT solution) each. Roche astaxanthin, a synthetic form of astaxanthin, was used for the test substance, while the control groups were orally administered MCT only three times by gavage. Restraint stress loading was performed under the same conditions as Example 1.

Mastocytoma subcultured in the abdominal cavities of DBA/2 mice in this laboratory was used for the P815 mastocytoma (DBA/2 mouse cutaneous mastocytoma). 1×10^4 cells/animal were transplanted into the caudal vein of each animal. Furthermore, animals of the restraint stress groups were transplanted with mastocytoma 24 hours after the start of stress loading. The liver was excised 16 days after transplantation and after Vaughn's fixation, the number of transplanted nodes on the liver surface was measured. Those results are shown in Fig. 7. As shown in Fig. 7, when a decrease in immunoactivity (NK cell activity, etc.) occurred due to stress loading, metastasis of the transplanted liver cancer was significantly promoted because of this. It was confirmed that administration of astaxanthin caused remarkable inhibition of promotion of cancer metastasis due to decreased immunological function caused by stress.

Preparation Example 1. Capsules	
Gelatin	70.0%
Glycerine	22.9%
Methyl paraoxybenzoate	0.15%
Propyl paraoxybenzoate	0.51%
Water	As necessary
Total	100%

Krill extract oil (containing 3.57% astaxanthin diester and 1.53% astaxanthin monoester) was filled into soft capsules composed of the above-mentioned ingredients in accordance with routine methods to obtain soft capsules weighing 180 mg per capsule.

Preparation Example 2. Drink

Flavoring: DL-sodium tartrate	1 g
Succinic acid	0.09 g
Sweetener: Liquid sugar	8 Kg
Sourness: Citric acid	120 g

Vitamin: Vitamin C	100 g
Astaxanthin ethylester	30 g
Vitamin E	300 g
Cyclodextrin	50 g
Fragrance	150 ml
Potassium chloride	10 g
Magnesium sulfate	5 g

The above-mentioned ingredients were blended followed by the addition of water to bring to a final volume of 100 liters. Approximately 100 ml of this drink is consumed per serving.

Preparation Example 3. Tonic

Flavoring: DL-sodium tartrate	1 g
Succinic acid	0.09 g
Sweetener: Liquid sugar	8 Kg
Sourness: Citric acid	120 g
Vitamins: Vitamin C	100 g
Vitamin B1	20 g
Vitamin B2	20 g
Vitamin B6	20 g
Vitamin B12	20 g
Folic acid	10 g
Nicotinic acid	20 g
Vitamin E	300 g
Cyclodextrin	50 g
Astaxanthin ethylester	30 g
Fragrance	150 ml
Potassium chloride	10 g
Magnesium sulfate	5 g

The above-mentioned ingredients were blended followed by the addition of water, to bring to a final volume of 100 liters. Approximately 100 ml of this tonic is consumed per serving.

Claims

1. An anti-stress composition comprising at least one of astaxanthin and its ester, and a conventional carrier.
- 5 2. A composition for preventing or alleviating decreased immunological function caused by stress comprising at least one of astaxanthin and its ester, and a conventional carrier.
3. A composition for preventing or alleviating a medical symptom due to decreased immunological function caused by stress, comprising at least one of astaxanthin and its ester, and a conventional carrier.
- 10 4. A composition according to claim 3 wherein said medical symptom due to decreased immunological function caused by stress is cancer metastasis or cancer promotion.
5. A composition for preventing or alleviating decreased liver function caused by stress comprising at least one of astaxanthin and its ester, and a conventional carrier.
- 15 6. A composition for preventing or alleviating fatigue caused by stress comprising at least one of astaxanthin and its ester, and a conventional carrier.
7. A composition according to any one of claims 1 through 6 wherein said composition is a pharmaceutical.
- 20 8. A composition according to any one of claims 1 through 6 wherein said composition is a functional food.
9. A food or beverage prepared by the addition of a composition according to any one of claims 1 through 5 to a food or beverage material essentially not containing astaxanthin and/or its ester.
- 25 10. Use of at least one of astaxanthin and its ester for preparation of an anti-stress composition.
11. Use of at least one of astaxanthin and its ester for preparation of a composition for preventing or alleviating decreased immunological function caused by stress.
- 30 12. Use of at least one of astaxanthin and/or its ester for preparation of a composition for preventing or improving a medical symptom due to decreased immunological function caused by stress.
13. Use according to claim 12 wherein said medical symptom due to decreased immunological function caused by stress is cancer metastasis or cancer promotion.
- 35 14. Use of at least one of astaxanthin and its ester for preparing a composition for preventing or alleviating decreased liver function caused by stress.
- 40 15. Use of at least one of astaxanthin and its ester for preparation of a composition for preventing or alleviating fatigue caused by stress.
16. Use according to any one of claims 10 through 15 wherein said composition is a pharmaceutical.
- 45 17. Use according to any one of claims 10 through 15 wherein said composition is a functional food.
18. A method of preparing a food or beverage comprising adding a composition according to any one of claims 1 through 6 to a food or beverage material essentially not containing astaxanthin and/or its ester.
- 50

Fig. 1

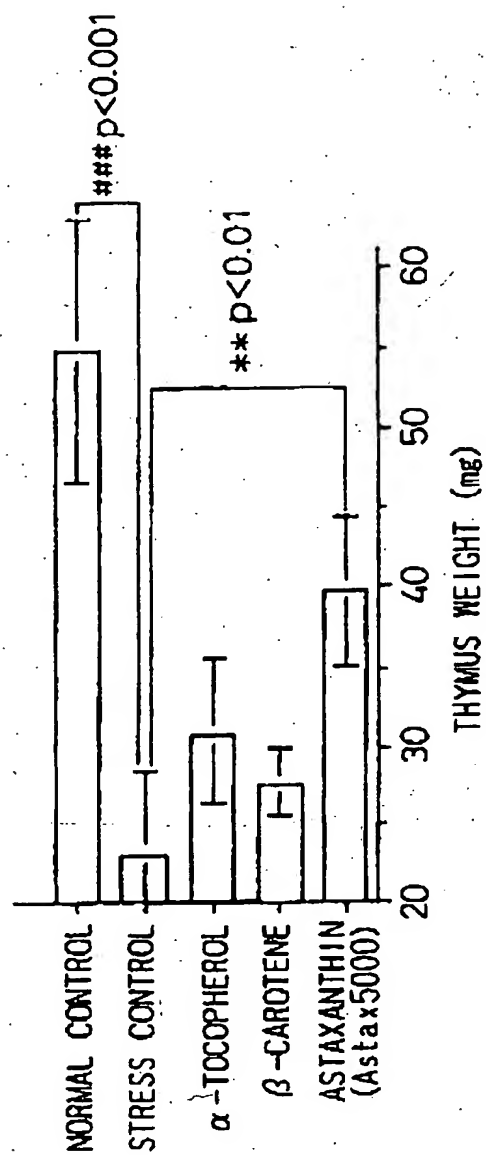


Fig.2

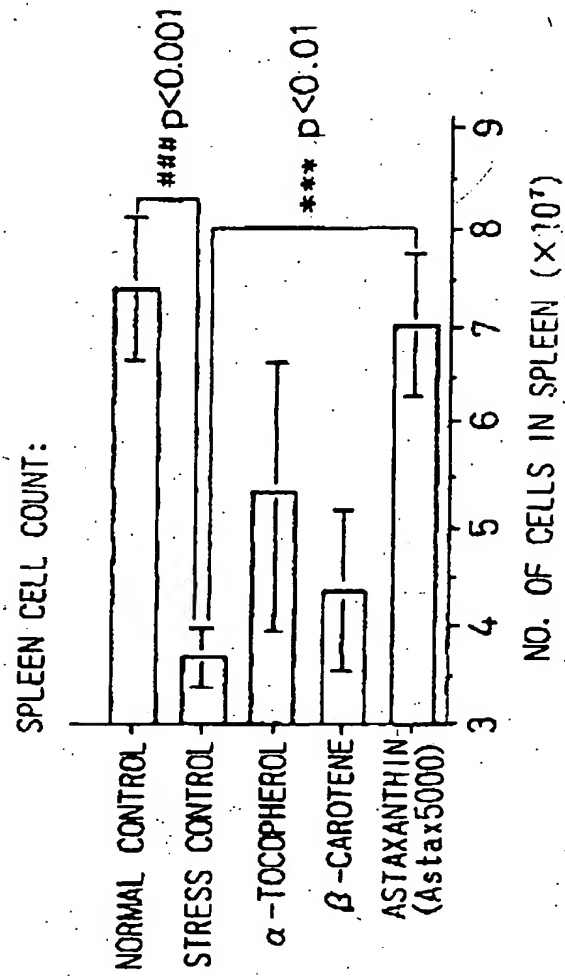


Fig.3

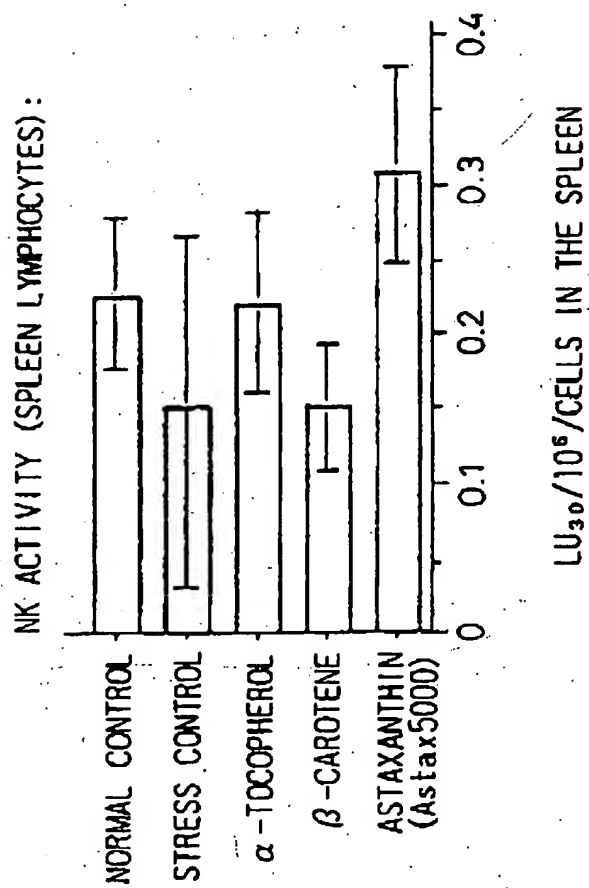


Fig. 4

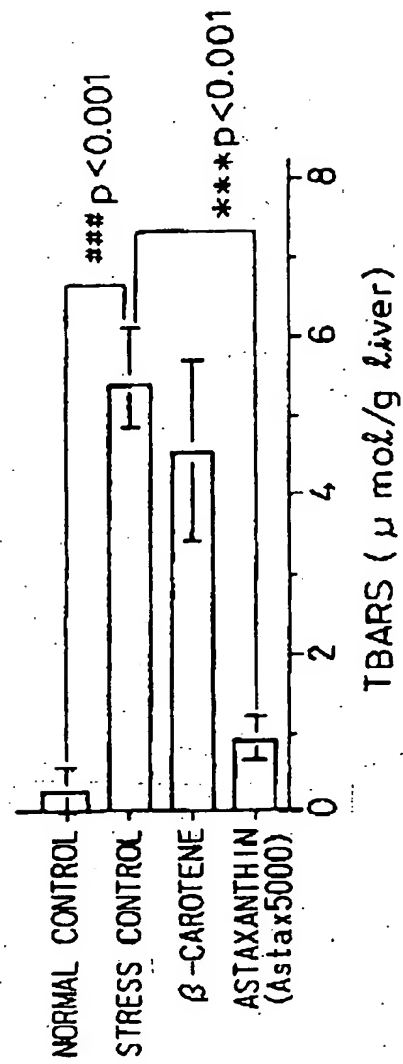


Fig. 5

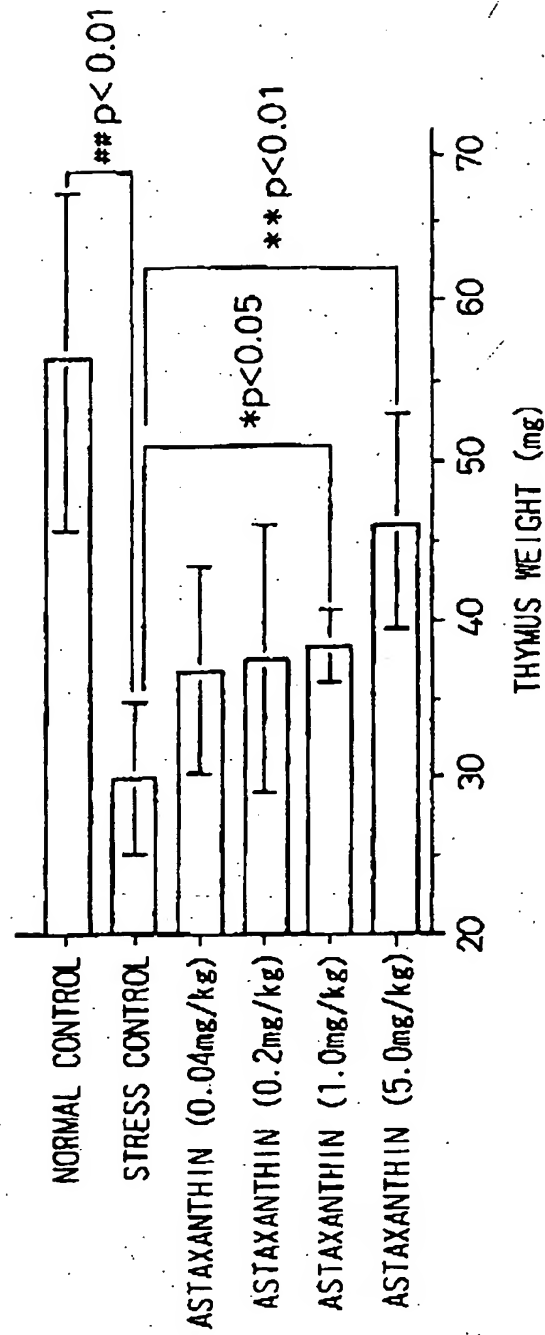


Fig. 6

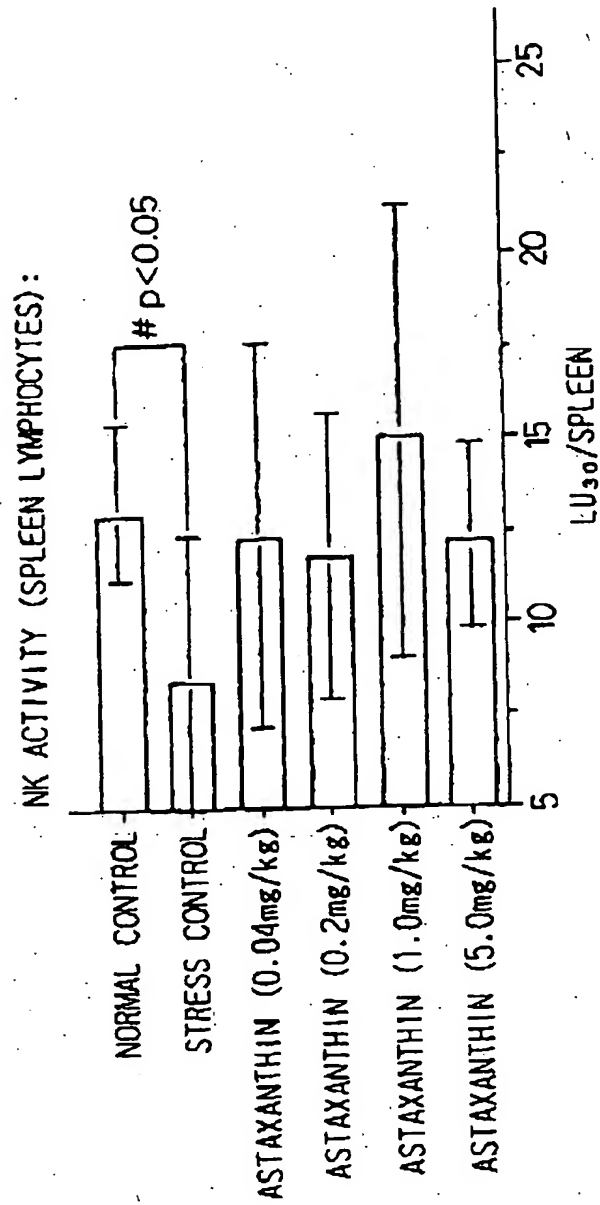
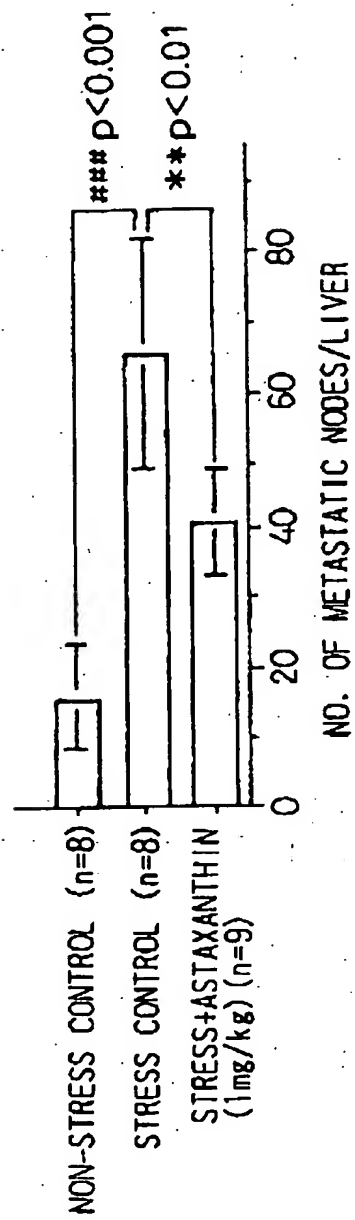


Fig. 7



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EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT

Application Number
EP 96 30 7737

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The present search report has been drawn up for all claims			
Place of search THE HAGUE		Date of completion of the search 26 February 1997	Examiner Klaver, T
CATEGORY OF CITED DOCUMENTS X : particularly relevant if taken alone Y : particularly relevant if combined with another document of the same category A : technological background O : non-written disclosure P : intermediate document U : theory or principle underlying the invention E : earlier patent document, but published on, or after the filing date D : document cited in the application L : document cited for other reasons & : member of the same patent family, corresponding document			

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EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT

Application Number
EP 96 30 7737

DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT			
Category	Citation of document with indication, where appropriate, of relevant passages	Relevant to claim	CLASSIFICATION OF THE APPLICATION (Int.Cl.6)
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			TECHNICAL FIELDS SEARCHED (Int.Cl.6)
The present search report has been drawn up for all claims			
Place of search THE HAGUE		Date of completion of the search 26 February 1997	Examiner Klaver, T
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